

# *Pandemonium: Radical Soundscapes and Satirical Prints in the Romantic Period*

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WE CAN BEGIN WITH A FAMOUS MOMENT of Romantic silence: “As I lay asleep in Italy.” These words form the opening line of P. B. Shelley’s *Mask of Anarchy*, his unpublished response to the massacre of innocent protestors in Manchester on August 16, 1819, an event soon rechristened as “Peterloo” in mock-epic allusion to the battle of Waterloo four years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Shelley’s somnambulant state is a self-fashioned and self-deriding posture that dramatizes his self-exiled detachment from the turbulent political conflict in England, a conflict that—as the grammatical construction indicates (“As I lay”)—is about to disturb his slumbers: “There came a voice from over the sea / And with great power it forth led me / To walk in the visions of Poesy.” Having revived both his poetic and his political energies, this powerful “voice” inspires the poet to reimagine Peterloo as a grotesque reactionary coup d’état led by the skeletal monstrosity Anarchy, an allegorical figure that inverts the hegemonic (anti-Jacobin) association of anarchy with mob rule. All this is familiar critical terrain, but far less attention has been paid to that strangely undefined “voice” that awakens the poet all those miles away. The more obvious interpretation is that the voice represents an interpellation or summons by the Spirit of the Age calling Shelley to his poetic mission (and the echo of Genesis 3:8—“they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day”—hints at the momentousness of this awakening). On the other hand, as James Chandler and others have noted, the “voice” could equally well be the “great power” of the British press that reported the outrage and that reached Shelley via *Galignani’s Messenger* or Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner*.<sup>2</sup> But if this is the “voice” of the liberal-radical press, we need to note that newspapers and periodicals are

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<sup>1</sup> I have used the version in Paul Foot, ed., *Shelley’s Revolutionary Year* (London: Redwords, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Chandler notes that, by sending the poem to Leigh Hunt for publication, Shelley could “close the circle” that began with his reading press reports of Peterloo published in Hunt’s *Examiner*. James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 83.

never univocal; they are always polyphonic, a constellation of microgenres that produce different sounds and reading experiences. Was Shelley responding to certain voices and not to others? In order to answer this question, we need to listen more closely to the range of voices and sounds in Shelley's poem and reconsider their relation to the originating event that inspired him to write a poem for the people.

Oddly, although the "voice" has "great power," we do not actually know what it says, making it less an anthropomorphized enunciation than a sound, a reverberation, an echo—like hearing the distant guns of an invisible battle. The voice has inspirational agency but no words. It is left to the poet to recover *his* voice and "through [his] lips" (to adopt a phrase from "Ode to the West Wind") to re-create Peterloo as a soundscape of political actors: Anarchy and his "ghastly" followers; the heroic resistance of the feminized figures Hope, Shape, and the stentorian Earth; and waiting in the wings the "Great Assembly" of the "fearless and free," the sublime voice of the people, the very sound that the Manchester protestors were hoping to project—"ye are many, they are few." The voice of the people in the poem is the restored anthem of the oppressed, "Eloquent, oracular; A volcano heard afar." Yet the status of the vox populi in the poem remains unstable; it is invoked by Earth, but we never hear it directly, perhaps reflecting Shelley's ambivalence about the lava-like power, the explosive volcanic potential, of radical discourse. This awkwardness is reflected also in the strange narrative shape of the poem; in an eerie proleptic loop, the "accents unwithstood," the trumpet of a prophecy, awaken the sleeping poet, but it is unclear whether the sounds belong inside or outside the text.<sup>3</sup> The voice of the people remains suspended in the ghostly world of reportage that this "vision of Poesy" transmutes and transcends. If in one sense the poem oratorically completes Peterloo (the actual speakers were arrested before they could finish speaking, so Earth's long oration fills the gap), the poem also raises some intriguing and unresolved questions about what can be termed the "sound of democracy" in the Romantic period. This sound had a material form, an aural machinery of oratory, meetings, toasts, and songs, but we have no direct access to this. As we are dealing with an era before sound recording, we can access the aural landscape only at second hand via cultural representations: in writing, music, art, and notably graphic satire, the latter being the only visual medium in which characters actually speak. Of course, this is the epistemological condition of all historical sound before the advent of wax cylinder recording in the later nineteenth century, but for obvious ideological reasons the voice of the people has always been more culturally fugitive and distorted than the dominant discourse of the polite classes (indeed, the grammatically impeccable but impossibly polished and sustained conversation in Austen's novels is a striking example of this hegemony; the lower classes are rarely seen and never heard). Shelley's unstable, hauntological framing devices (the disembodied, muse-like voice, the tentative dream vision reminiscent of *Queen Mab*, the three ethereal female entities who deliver the poem's political manifesto) are symptomatic of the problem of poetically impersonating or authorizing a discourse that, by definition, operated outside the political public sphere. If those in power are not listening, one option is to shout louder, to turn up the volume to sublime or even—as in Shelley's case—apocalyptic levels. But this is a high-risk strategy, as every time the people become collectively noisier, they risk conforming to the negative stereotype of the unruly rabble. The Romantic period saw the

<sup>3</sup> Wolfson touches on this issue when she notes that the poem contradictorily locates political oratory in a dream vision. Susan Wolfson, *Formal Changes: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 102–3.

first sustained attempt to cleanse the imagery of popular protest of its association with mob rule, but the dominant perception remained that of Pandemonium, and all reformers had to negotiate this problem.<sup>4</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF SUBLIME SOUND AND THE “IRRESISTIBLE VOICE” OF DEMOCRACY

Shelley’s eloquent volcano mobilizes a well-wrought Romantic trope of the revolutionary natural sublime, which has specific Burkean roots.<sup>5</sup> In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke addresses how very loud sounds can achieve sublime effects. He begins by ruling out words, as they have a denotative as well as aural function, and instead focuses on natural and nonlinguistic sounds. The key feature is volume or scale, but the illustration from popular politics is the crucial detail:

Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror. The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind, though we can observe no nicety or artifice in those sorts of music. The shouting of multitudes has a similar effect; and by the sole strength of the sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that in this staggering, and hurry of the mind, the best established tempers can scarcely forbear being born down, and joining in the common cry, and common resolution of the crowd.<sup>6</sup>

Burke could have in mind here the popular plebeian customs of “skimmington,” charivari, and “rough music,” in which local communities inflicted a variety of intimidating and theatrical punishments on local offenders (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> But Burke’s language suggests that he is thinking of organized political action, almost as if he sensed the imminent eruption of popular politics in the “Wilkes and Liberty” campaigns of the 1760s. The “terror” of mob rule and the overwhelming of the “best established tempers” also foreshadow the more famous and influential denunciations of Jacobin violence in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Burke’s specific exclusion of words reduces the “common resolution of the crowd” to mere “shouting,” a debasement

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the problem of representing the political crowd in this period, see Ian Haywood, *Bloody Romanticism: Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation, 1776–1832* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), chap. 5. More recently, see Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Georgina Green, *The Majesty of the People: Popular Sovereignty and the Role of the Writer in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of the volcanic sublime in Romantic literature and culture, see Cian Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700–1830: Classic Ground* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), chap. 2, esp. 99–101. For its specific uses in Shelley’s poetry, see Duffy’s earlier study *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 176–86. The source of the “oracular” powers of volcanoes derived from classical myths about Vesuvius. Though Shelley drew on the myth in his poetry, he was also ambivalent about the idea of volcanic Liberty, as Italy was still under Austrian rule—hence, his nervousness about recommending revolution to the “post-Peterloo” leaders. Like most critics of the sublime, Duffy has nothing to say specifically about sound. See, however, Shelley Trower, *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (London: Continuum, 2012), 24–29, for a science-based discussion of the benefits and disbenefits of aural stimulation, including the political manipulation of the mesmerized crowd.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), 65–66.

<sup>7</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (London: Merlin Press, 1991), 468–530; and his essay “Rough Music Reconsidered,” *Folklore* 103, no. 1 (1992): 3–26.



**FIGURE 1**  
William Hogarth,  
*Hudibras encounters  
the Skimmington*  
(1726)

reinforced by the punning word “common,” which signifies both collectivity and vulgarity. There are other significant ambiguities in the key words: the primary meaning of “resolution” is an irresistible willpower that smothers dissent, but the word carries a residual meaning of rational debate.<sup>8</sup> This dumbing-down of the crowd reflects a growing intolerance in eighteenth-century polite culture toward what Mark Smith calls the “social noise” of the lower classes. Smith argues that “quietude” increasingly became the privilege of the social elite and a metaphysical refuge for exercising the virtues of contemplation over worldly action and materiality.<sup>9</sup> Peter Denney also notes that, as the century progressed, plebeian noise was perceived as “instances of savagery and, at worst, auxiliaries of rebellion.”<sup>10</sup> By the 1790s, such aural anxieties had become tangled up with political fears of domestic revolution and Jacobin infiltration. Summed up in popular pictorial terms, British culture had moved from the genial comedy of Hogarth’s enraged musician to the caricatured, enslaved, and mouth-padlocked John Bull of the Two Acts (also known as the Gaggling Acts; figs. 2–3).

Retuning our senses to the phonic contours of Romantic literary and political culture adds a valuable new perspective to a familiar story. In the dumbing-down of popular protest, we can hear an epic (and mock-epic) symphony of resistance, repression, and regulation that defines popular perceptions of the crowd to the present day, as well as providing background mood music for the privatized, interiorized, and generally muted voice of the celebrated Romantic lyric, a discursive compromise between perilous “free” speech and servile silence. By the 1790s, the political voice of the people had two extreme forms: the bad sublime of Burke and the republican chorus of Paine. The anti-Jacobin tirades in Burke’s writings of the 1790s are familiar, but it is worth emphasizing their aural component. For Burke, Jacobin political discourse was lethal and unnatural, as it had lost touch with religion, humanity, community, nation, and tradition. Jacobinism had two distinct voices (or, more accurately, a voice and a noise): the icy, imperious, and heartless articulation

<sup>8</sup> Duffy (*Landscapes of the Sublime*, 85) notes that “the volcanic sublime always threatens to exceed or to overwhelm representation,” which may contain an unintentional pun, as the word “representation” refers to both aesthetics and politics.

<sup>9</sup> Mark M. Smith, *Sensory History* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), chap. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Denney, “‘The Sounds of Population Fail’: Changing Perceptions of Rural Poverty and Plebeian Noise in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Experiences of Poverty in Late Medieval and Early Modern England and France*, ed. Anne M. Scott (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 299.





**FIGURE 2**  
William Hogarth,  
*The Enraged Musician*  
(1741)



**FIGURE 3**  
Anon., *A Free Born Englishman!* (1795)

of ideologically driven leaders such as Robespierre; and the (literally) unspeakable, subhuman violence of the mob. The infamous march of the *poissards* to and from Versailles in October 1798 (fig. 4) climaxes in a sublime charivari as the French king and queen are escorted back to Paris to an accompaniment of the “horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women.”<sup>11</sup> This saturnalian carmagnole, which seems to be based as much on William Dent’s caricature as on factual reportage, is Burke’s riposte to Richard Price’s Revolution Society sermon of November 1789, which broadcast a very different, utopian music:

I have lived to see THIRTY MILLIONS of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.<sup>12</sup>

Price’s “irresistible voice” is certainly loud and overpowering; indeed, it is so sublime as to be barely credible, the unified voice of a whole nation. Nor does it eschew an element of righteous terror, insofar as the solitary monarch—Burke’s “best established temper”—is under its sway. But the idealization is a necessary, republican counterweight to Burke’s shouting multitude, and it is the voice that Shelley both hears and reproduces thirty years later. Thomas Paine also heard this sound. Remembering the Gordon Riots, Paine accepted that a mob existed in all European countries, though he explained this as a reflex of Old Corruption’s violent rule. The deliberate degradation of the “vast mass of mankind” was the result of the ruling class’s paranoid fear of popular enlightenment. For Paine, the iconic manifestation of the democratic principle was the “national convention,” or people’s parliament, a site where the “irresistible voice” of democracy could be heard loud and clear going about its business of rational reform. In part 2 of *Rights of Man* (1792), Paine describes this “new system”:

Formerly, when divisions arose respecting governments, recourse was had to the sword, and a civil war ensued. That savage custom is exploded by the new system, and reference is had to national conventions. Discussion and the general will arbitrate the question, and to this private opinion yields with a good grace, and order is preserved uninterrupted.<sup>13</sup>

This is Paine’s republican version of Burke’s “common resolution.” Instead of a situation where might is right and “the sole strength of the sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that in this staggering, and hurry of the mind,”<sup>14</sup> there is no choice but to capitulate to the general will, Paine proposes “discussion” and consensus. In a typically audacious manner, Paine inverts dominant political and social hierarchies by accusing monarchical government of atavistic savagery and by investing the people with the enlightened and civic virtues of “good grace,” order, and the political eloquence of the public sphere.

It was precisely when this utopian ideal began to take on a material presence in Britain in the aftermath of *Rights of Man* that the authorities took fright and clamped down. The aim was to lower the volume or even silence the voice of radicalism; this applied to its literal manifestation at indoor and outdoor (or “monster”) political meetings and to its virtual presence in radical

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 122.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Price, *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 195.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner (London: Penguin, 1984), 58–59, 272.

<sup>14</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 65.





**FIGURE 4** William Dent, *Female Furies of Extraordinary Revolution* (1789)

print culture. In order to restrict the right of assembly and the radical press, Pitt's government unleashed the full force of repressive legislation and state surveillance: the Two Acts, a stamp duty hike, the suspension of habeas corpus, the proscription of radical organizations, the treason trials, Secret Committee reports, networks of informers, and the sponsoring of ultraloyalist vigilante groups such as the Association for the Protection of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. The aim was to demonize, discredit, and disrupt all radical speech acts, even when used indoors and away from carnivalesque public space. Radical orators like John Thelwall were prime targets. As Coleridge stated in *The Plot Discovered* (1795), Thelwall "speaks the feelings of multitudes."<sup>15</sup> Thelwall's popular lectures were duly disrupted by loyalist thugs, but equally important in this offensive were caricature prints that represented radical oratory as laughable, bizarre, and ludicrous. James Gillray's *Copenhagen House* (1795) is perhaps the most well-known example of this technique (fig. 5). Instead of inspired and dignified oratory, the scene shows mere "shouting," an effect conveyed by Thelwall's grotesquely gaping mouth and reinforced by the absence of speech bubbles. In both aesthetic and physiognomical theory, an open mouth was regarded as a particularly offensive gesture, to the extent that even so-called conversation paintings never showed a person actually speaking (conversation is conveyed by gestures and gazes rather than speech). Charles Le Brun's famous range of extreme expressions featured many open mouths and bared teeth, including a grimace of terror.<sup>16</sup> High culture took its steer from the celebrated classical sculpture of Laocoön and his sons being strangled by sea serpents. According to G. E. Lessing, to show Laocoön realistically shrieking in pain would be an aesthetic disaster: "[a] hideous and unseemly image, from which the spectator will turn away his eyes in

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 297.

<sup>16</sup> See Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun's Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 149.



**FIGURE 5** James Gillray, *Copenhagen House* (1795)

disgust”; “a mouth drawn widely open is in itself an unseemly spot upon the canvass, and an ugly hollow in the marble, presenting the most disagreeable effect imaginable.”<sup>17</sup>

The artistic exception to these rules was caricature; operating outside academic regulation, graphic satire reveled in what Bakhtin calls “grotesque realism,” the antithesis of “classical” beauty. Caricature reveled in “unseemly spots” and “ugly hollows.” Moreover, it was the only art form to represent actual speech in the form of speech bubbles and embedded text. This enabled it to transform parliamentary politics into noisy verbal and visual spectacles more reminiscent of the infamous “mob” than an elevated “senate” (the withering word used by Shelley in his poem “England in 1819”). No politicians were spared, but as exemplified by Gillray’s treatment of Thelwall, radical activists were more often than not depicted as grotesque and “savage” in order to exaggerate their lowly social origins and their alleged incompetence. The open mouth signifies loss of civility: shouting rather than speaking in the case of orators, and dumbstruck gullibility on the part of the listeners. As Steve Poole has noted: “Since most plebeian English Jacobins of the 1790s were unrecognizable to the wider public, caricature representations tended to adopt a familiar visual language. Jacobins, like Frenchmen, were invariably ragged, ignorant, unkempt, ungainly and cowardly with poor complexions, Neanderthal brows and gaping mouths.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> G. E. Lessing, *Laocoon: Or the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. William Ross (London: J. Ridgway, 1836), 24. Lessing asserts that in painting, unlike poetry, “deformity stands forth in all the collective strength of its features, and its effect is but little weaker than nature” (250).

<sup>18</sup> Steve Poole, “Gillray, Cruikshank and Thelwall: Visual Satire, Physiognomy and the Jacobin Body,” in “John Thelwall: Critical Reassessments,” ed. Yasmin Solomonescu, *Romantic Circles Praxis*, September 2011, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/thelwall/>.



At its most zealous, the counterrevolutionary state tried to delegitimize radical sociability itself, including the hallowed sphere of private conversation so beloved of Godwinism and, according to Habermas, the foundation of the public sphere. An off-the-cuff disloyal remark in an alehouse was now enough to warrant a jail sentence. This climate of aural surveillance is lampooned in Thelwall's periodical the *Peripatetic* (1793) in a scene where he meets a Godwinian character called Ambulator. On witnessing rural poverty, Ambulator launches into an impassioned defense of universal suffrage, a reform that would make Parliament realize "the importance of every peasant's voice." But Thelwall interjects:

"Hush! hush! my friend!" exclaimed I, "suppress this freedom of speech, and remember THE ASSOCIATION! The fervors of patriotic humanity, and the confidence of friendship must no longer be indulged, since confederated placemen invite us to turn informers."<sup>19</sup>

The nervous humor in the passage reflects the fact that Thelwall was arrested for treason in 1794 on the pretext that, in his own words, he had used "a violent word in a moment of irritation and debate" and uttered a "ridiculous toast."<sup>20</sup> Under this kind of pressure, even some of the most liberal "best established tempers" buckled and abandoned popular radicalism. Both Godwin and Coleridge distanced themselves from what Thelwall called "popular enquiry." In *Political Justice* (1793), Godwin attacked "Political Associations" in stereotypical terms as unregulated enthusiasm: in "the insatiate gulf of noisy assemblies" with their democratic paraphernalia of resolutions and platform speakers, "all is delusion or tumult... [and] the conviviality of a feast may lead to the depredations of a riot."<sup>21</sup> In a critique of radical oratory that mirrors the satirical prints' lampoons, he argues that "harangues and declamation... lead to passion, not to knowledge. The memory of the hearer is crowded with pompous nothings, with images and not arguments." In other words, such oratory is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing but trouble. Instead of proceeding by "slow and regular progression," the speaker must "work up the passions of his hearer to a tempest of applause," a reversion to the bad sublime. In the throes of the 1795 campaign to oppose the Two Acts, Godwin warned that "sober enquiry may pass well enough with a man in his closet, or in the domestic tranquility of his own fire-side; but it will not suffice in theatres and halls of assembly."<sup>22</sup> It is unclear if Godwin's preferred ideal of "magnificent harmony" passing "through the whole community" applies only to privately consumed print, but this seems the most likely conclusion. Jon Mee sums up Godwin's awkward position as a "paradox of unlimited enquiry within strictly regulated limits."<sup>23</sup> Thelwall's response was to propose a new model of discursive circulation in which a "throb of sensation" expands into "undulations

<sup>19</sup> John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic* (London: John Thelwall, 1793), 146–47.

<sup>20</sup> John Thelwall, *The Natural and Constitutional Rights of Britons* (1795); cited in Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36.

<sup>21</sup> William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice: and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1793), 1:208.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Philp, ed., *Poetical and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 3:118, 122, 4:144, 146. For all his published distaste for tavern culture, Godwin may have attended a "convivial gathering" at the home of Richard "Citizen" Lee in early 1795; see Jon Mee, "Radical Political Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 125.

<sup>23</sup> Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention and Community, 1760 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 152. Mee discusses how radicals, such as Thelwall and Hazlitt, struggled to reconcile free and open discussion with control of the passions (151–56, 261–62).

of virtuous sympathy.”<sup>24</sup> Presumably Thelwall’s throbs and undulations emanate from both live speech acts and radical print, though even he stuck a health warning on his oratory: “he who sells his principles for applause, is as base as he who sells them for a place or a pension.”<sup>25</sup>

Coleridge also drew the democratic line at the vulgar audience. In *Conciones ad Populam* (1795), he depicts plebeian political activists as Gillrayan sansculottes:

They listen only to the inflammatory harangues of some mad-headed Enthusiast, and imbibe from them poison, not food; rage, not liberty. Unillumined by philosophy, and stimulated to a lust of revenge by aggravated wrongs, they would make the altar of freedom stream with blood.<sup>26</sup>

Coleridge accepts that the free press is a “power resident in the people,” but he is careful to divert political agency away from this same “people” toward a religious and aestheticized version of Burke’s sublimely noisy multitude:

The power of the press (a power resident in the people) gives us an *influential* sovereignty [to] be expressed, first, perhaps in low and distant tones, such as beseem the children of peace; but if corruption deafen power, gradually increasing till they swell into a deep and awful thunder, the VOICE OF GOD . . . , by the almost winged communication of the Press, the whole nation becomes one grand Senate, fervent yet untumultuous.<sup>27</sup>

Coleridge is prepared to contemplate the good sublime of a thunderous press and its concomitant national assembly, but only on the condition that popular politics remains “untumultuous” and that its sublime, “winged” power appeals ultimately to religious morality and authority. Radical rebuttals of such misrepresentations of democratic reform fell on deaf ears. To loyalists and fearful liberals, a democratic Convention—“Coblers” who “meet in grand debate,” according to one of Hannah More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts*<sup>28</sup>—could only be a travesty, not an imitation of Parliament. In short, Pandemonium.

## PANDEMONIUM’S “HUBBUB WILD”

In book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan and his fallen angels construct their own senate in the bowels of Hell:

A third as soon had formed within the ground  
A various mould, and from the boiling cells  
By strange conveyance filled each hollow nook,  
As in an organ from one blast of wind  
To many a row of pipes the sound-board breath  
Anon out of the earth a fabric huge  
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound  
Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet,  
Built like a Temple . . .

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Fairclough, *Romantic Crowd*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures 1795*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 312–13.

<sup>28</sup> “The Shopkeeper Turned Sailor,” from *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1798); cited in Haywood, *Revolution in Popular Literature*, 63.

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Mean while the winged heralds by command  
 Of sovereign power, with awful ceremony  
 And trumpet's sound throughout the host proclaim  
 A solemn council forthwith to be held  
 At Pandaemonium, the high capital  
 Of Satan and his Peers.<sup>29</sup>

Though this description recognizes the sublime grandeur of the Satanic court in terms of an aural and musical accompaniment to the architectural spectacle, the modern, pejorative use of the word “pandemonium”—“Utter confusion, uproar; wild and noisy disorder; a tumult; chaos” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, meaning 2b)—was already coming into use in the eighteenth century. Initially, the Miltonic allusion provided a handy, mock-epic tool for ridiculing the antics and corrupt culture of parliamentary politics, and the thrust of the satire was directed at mainstream, not radical, politicians. As Christopher Reid has shown in his study of the language of the House of Commons in this period, the histrionics, rowdiness, bluster, adversarial culture, and sheer deceit of Parliament lent itself readily to parody and derision.<sup>30</sup> A caricature called *The True Portraits of the Majority of the Parliament of Pandemonium*, which appeared in the *Oxford Magazine* in 1777, shows a motley assortment of devils and politicians (including Lord North and Lord Holland) sitting round the “Coffin of Liberty” (fig. 6). The presiding speaker declares, “he that dares be virtuous shall be punished.” This iconography of a crowded meeting room full of disreputable,



**FIGURE 6** *The True Portraits of the Majority of the Parliament of Pandemonium* from the *Oxford Magazine* (1777)

<sup>29</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alisdair Fowler (London: Longman, 1976), 1:705–57.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers: The Rhetorical Culture of the House of Commons, 1760–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 5.



licentious political figures—a trope that owes much to Hogarth<sup>31</sup>—could easily be adapted for antiradical propaganda in the 1790s and beyond. Adjacent passages from *Paradise Lost* provided additional satirical imagery. In order to enter Pandemonium, the majority of the fallen angels have to be reduced to Lilliputian size, “now less than smallest dwarfs”;<sup>32</sup> and when Satan leaves Hell on his epic flight to Earth he passes through the bad sublime of Chaos:

At length a universal hubbub wild  
Of stunning sounds and voices all confused  
Borne through the hollow dark assaults his ear  
With loudest vehemence...<sup>33</sup>

Caricaturists mercilessly exploited these two contradictory elements of amplification and diminution: “stunning sounds” and infantilizing miniaturization. A good example is Isaac Cruikshank’s *The Royal Extinguisher or Gulliver putting out the Patriots of Lilliput* (1795), a progovernment intervention into the Two Acts controversy (fig. 7). In some ways a companion piece to Gillray’s *Copenhagen House*, it shows a giant William Pitt dressed as a watchman in the act of placing an enormous extinguisher (a conical shaped device for putting out candlelit streetlights) over a group of gesticulating Opposition politicians who are bound within a hoop called “Copenhagen.” One of these figures, who resembles Thelwall, is shown in an emphatic oratorical stance. Pitt declaims: “Aye! Aye! My Seditious Lads I’m down upon You I’ll Darken your Day lights I’ll stop your Throats.” The print wittily undermines the stentorian pretensions of the Lilliputians, but the illogicality of needing to “stop” the barely legible sound of such minuscule figures is a classic case of the ideological slipperiness of caricature. On second viewing, it is apparent that both sides are mocked and that the government appears to be overreacting. The satirical “extinguisher” was revived several times in the next three decades, and each time, its seemingly triumphalist imagery conveys this ambivalence about the loss of free speech and right of assembly.<sup>34</sup>

Another popular way for caricaturists to depict the radical “hubbub” was to follow the example of the *Oxford Magazine* and fill the print with a jammed, chaotic, and farcical depiction of a political meeting. In such a melee, communication becomes a travesty: overloaded, incoherent, or simply impossible. When mass radical campaigning revived in the postwar period, graphic satire attacked both indoor and outdoor oratory; any radical meeting, even if limited to relatively small numbers inside a civic building, was essentially a version of Pandemonium’s “solemn council.” After 1815, the main celebrity in the firing line was now Thelwall’s successor, Henry “Orator” Hunt. Like Thelwall, Hunt’s power over the crowd not only was a problem for the authorities but also made genteel reformers nervous. When Hunt rose to fame at the Spa Fields “monster meetings” in 1816, the leading liberal journalist Leigh Hunt (no relation) attacked the orator for having whipped up the bad sublime, “mere noise and violence” instead of the Godwinian “union of firmness and quiet.”<sup>35</sup> George Cruikshank, later to do a great service to radicalism in the wake

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., *Strolling Actresses in the Barn* (1738), *Election Entertainment* (1754), *Cockpit* (1759), and numerous gambling and drinking scenes in Hogarth’s narrative series such as “A Rake’s Progress” (1734) and “Industry and Idleness” (1747). It goes without saying that caricature depictions of outdoor crowds also owed much to Hogarth.

<sup>32</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1:779.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:951–54.

<sup>34</sup> See, in particular, George Cruikshank’s *The Royal Extinguisher* (1821), a clear homage to his father’s original.

<sup>35</sup> *Examiner*, November 24, 1816.



**FIGURE 7** Isaac Cruikshank, *The Royal Extinguisher or Gulliver putting out the Patriots of Lilliput* (1795)

of the Peterloo massacre, also attacked Hunt's demagoguery. In *The Spa-Fields Orator Hunt-ing for Popularity to Do-Good* (1817), it is Hunt's verbosity—represented by a huge speech bubble—that threatens to topple him from his oratorical perch (fig. 8). The speech hangs over his audience like a malicious cloud or banner, and Hunt's words betray an inflated ego and political ambition:

The lying newspapers call me an ignorant Demagogue and an Imposter & Do Good also! but with some assistance I'll make my enemies shake in their shoes let 'em look to their Windows! . . . Don't let any body speak here but myself lest you should change your opinion of me & think I am a stupid lying Incendiary—Knock off all the hats you can get at wherever I pass in token of respect & Draw me to my lodgings in my own Tandem!!!

The print is crammed to bursting point with textual “hubbub.” Another orator rails, “Reform the Church! Down with the Bishops! we are strong enough now to take away their Loaves & fishes & D——n them all,” while one of the doggerel poems below the image satirizes Hunt's inarticulacy:

Orator Hunt he could both read and write,  
Meagre his mind tho' and stunt;  
His knowledge of grammar indeed was so slight,  
That a sentence of English he couldn't indite.

The overt message is that Hunt is a phony populist, but once again the careful viewer of the print might detect a semiotic and ideological inconsistency: Hunt is simultaneously illiterate

and magnetic, pathetic and powerful. Charles Williams's *The Smithfield Parliament, ie Universal Suffrage—the New Speaker addressing the Members* (fig. 9) tried to remove any ambiguity by reverting to an older form of visual wit and political allegory. When Hunt addressed an open-air meeting in Smithfield, the site of London's central meat market, Williams leapt at the opportunity to revive Burke's "swinish multitude." Hunt is shown with an ass's head and (in deference to his elevated status) a human body, while his audience comprise cows, sheep, and pigs standing on their hind legs, blithely unaware that their next venue will be the killing fields. Hunt's oratory is lampooned from his own mouth: "I shall be ambitious indeed if I thought my Bray could be heard by the immense and respectable multitude I have the Honor to address." However, in another print Williams came perilously close to depicting an uncaricatured version of the orator's vulgar open mouth. *The Spa Fields Hunt-er, or A Patriot Mounted* (November 1816), shows Hunt haranguing a well-dressed and respectable crowd from the top of a hackney coach (fig. 10). Unusually, the full-frontal positioning of Hunt means that the viewer of the print is forced to make eye contact with the orator and to become a proxy member of his audience. The open mouth is not a comfortable object to look at, but it is not grotesque and there is no embedded text to ridicule the occasion. According to H. T. Dickinson, this was one of the "very few" caricatures not "sharply hostile to Hunt."<sup>36</sup>

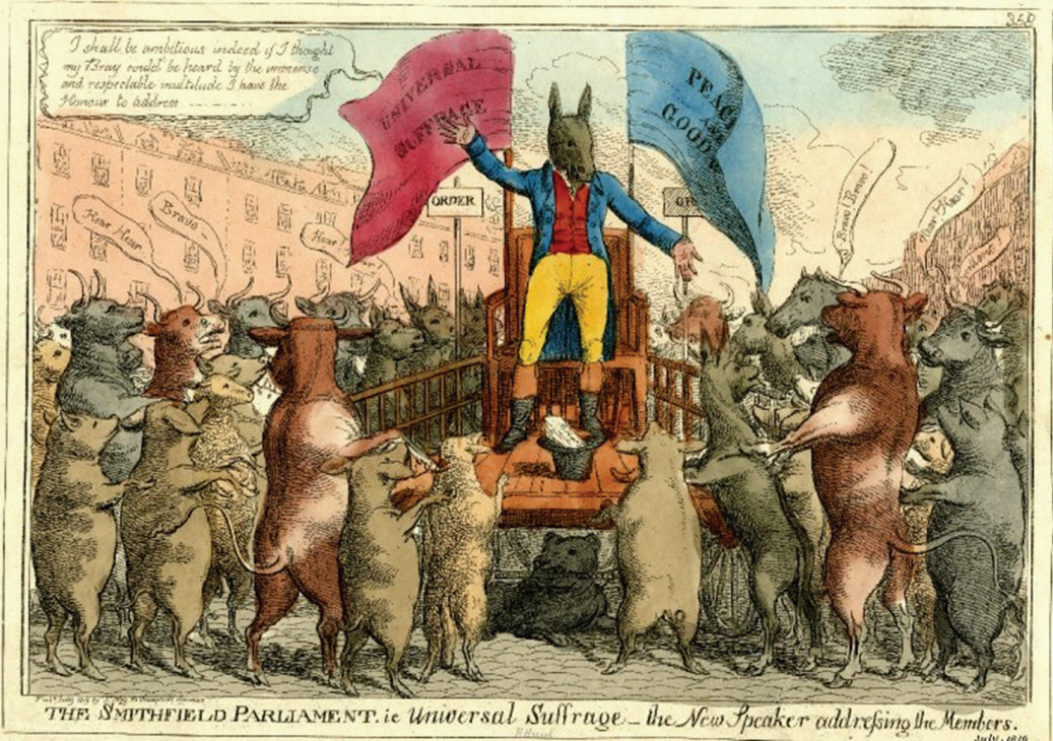
Despite these interventions and the revival of the Two Acts in 1817, the "irresistible" voice of the people grew louder in mass meetings and the burgeoning radical press. Such was the rising political temperature that in July 1819, just one month before the Peterloo massacre, George Cruikshank felt the need to make two significant statements about the limits of reform. In *The New Union Club*, he ruled out the involvement of black activists, and in *The Belle Alliance, or the*



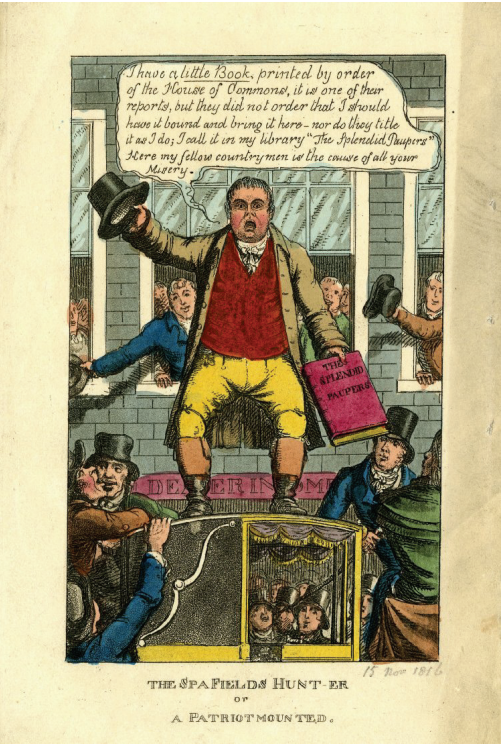
**FIGURE 8** George Cruikshank, *The Spa-Fields Orator Hunt-ing for Popularity to Do-Good* (1817)

<sup>36</sup> H. T. Dickinson, ed., *Caricatures and the Constitution, 1760–1832* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986), 232.





**FIGURE 9** Charles Williams, *The Smithfield Parliament, ie Universal Suffrage—the New Speaker addressing the Members* (1819)



**FIGURE 10** Charles Williams, *The Spa Fields Hunt-er, or A Patriot Mounted* (1816)





FIGURE 11 George Cruikshank, *The New Union Club* (1819)



FIGURE 12 George Cruikshank, *The Belle Alliance, or the Female Reformers of Blackburn!!!* (1819)







*Female Reformers of Blackburn!!!*, he poured scorn on women's involvement in politics (figs. 11–12). Both prints are offensive to modern eyes (and ears), but visually they show the durability of the caricature representation of Pandemonium. *The New Union Club* (a skit on the abolitionist Africa Society) is a rowdy melee of racist slapstick, debauchery, and social and sexual miscegenation in which blacks replace the feckless republican Irish of the print's precursor, Gillray's *Union Club* of 1801. *The Belle Alliance* is chockablock with anti-Jacobin imagery, lewd puns, grotesque bodies, and gaping mouths. However, the inclusion of excerpts from press reports of the lampooned meeting is an ironic or backhanded testimony to the existence of this new political formation: these women, though masculinized and bullish, are organized. For all the rowdiness and raucousness of the scene, the women's voices can be heard (they are given speech bubbles). Despite the ridicule, the energy of the scene conveys an overwhelming sense of a momentum toward the climactic meeting in Saint Peter's Fields (just weeks away) in which female reformers were a conspicuous presence. Unintentionally, the print foreshadows one of Cruikshank's greatest successes, as within less than a month he would be instrumental in immortalizing one of the Romantic period's most iconic political events. The final section of this article is the first examination of the soundscape of Peterloo and the innovative ways in which Cruikshank used aural allusion to satirize state power.

### PETERLOO'S IRONIC SOUNDTRACK

The trampling of innocent protestors by the yeoman cavalry on August 16, 1819, was a propaganda gift for the radical movement. Within days of the tragedy, the event had been christened "Peterloo" in the radical media, a bitterly punning reference to the battle of Waterloo four years earlier. The unprovoked attack on an orderly protest gave radicals the evidence they needed to turn the tables on the government; after decades of pedaling a loyalist stereotype of radicalism, as predicated on violence and anarchy, the state had finally shown its true colors and committed an atrocity. Cruikshank lost no time in providing a visual language for the Peterloo "myth" of slaughtered innocence and an out-of-control repressive state apparatus. In quick succession, he published two prints that stamped an indelible identity on Peterloo in the popular imagination: *Massacre at St Peter's or "Britons Strike Home"!!!* and *Manchester Heroes* (figs. 13–14). These images are deservedly very well known, but their "soundtrack," which contains several surprises, has gone unnoticed. There are two types of sound at work in the scenes: mimetic and diegetic. The former refers to the represented, realistic sound that an actual participant or observer might have heard. The latter refers to sounds that are added to the scene through allusion and that provide the equivalent of a musical accompaniment or score. Cruikshank's "soundtrack" is his most innovative and original contribution to the popular image of Peterloo, but in order to appreciate his ingenuity we should first consider how he acoustically re-creates the horrors of this inverted Pandemonium.

First of all, we can imagine the sublime, deafening cacophony of aggression, panic, and suffering that makes terror both the theme and the emotional effect of Cruikshank's scenes. We can assume that communicable speech—Burke's excluded words—would struggle to make itself heard above what Shelley, in another "exoteric" poem, calls "the festival din / Of Death, and Destruction, and Sin."<sup>37</sup> For obvious reasons, the panic-stricken crowd are not saying very much. They are indeed a "shouting multitude," but for the opposite reasons to those proposed by Burke:

<sup>37</sup> "Lines Written During the Castlereagh Administration," in Foot, *Shelley's Revolutionary Year*.

far from signifying popular political power, the open mouths and grotesque facial expressions signify violated innocence and incredulity. A corroborating account of this ironic transformation of the Peterloo protestors into the acoustic bad sublime can be found in the memoirs of Samuel Bamford. Initially, the sound of the assembling crowd is awesome: the arrival of Henry Hunt “was hailed by one universal shout from probably eighty thousand persons.” Bamford had never seen “such a mass of human beings”; “their power for good or evil was irresistible, and who should direct that power? Himself alone who had called it forth. The task was great, and not without its peril.”<sup>38</sup> But before Hunt can either use or abuse his power, Bamford hears a “noise and strange murmur.” What follows next is a curious aural exchange:

On the cavalry drawing up they were received with a shout, of good will, as I understood it. They shouted again, waving their sabres over their heads; and then, slackening rein, and striking spur into their steeds, they dashed forward, and began cutting the people.<sup>39</sup>

This exchange of shouts, a kind of mock-parley, is the point at which the good sublime meets its nemesis. The people’s “shout, of good will,” another example of the “irresistible” voice of democracy, is answered by unaccountable brute force that “cuts,” or retailers, the people into Burke’s “resistless,” howling multitude:

For a moment the crowd held back as in a pause; then was a rush, heavy and resistless as a headlong sea; and a sound like low thunder, with screams, prayers and imprecations from the crowd-moiled, and sabre-doomed, who could not escape.<sup>40</sup>

The terrorized people can be contrasted with the uncaricatured radical orators in the background of *Manchester Heroes*. Their cries of “shame” and “murder,” though not exactly examples of radical oratory, are nevertheless an important corrective against decades of demonization and negation. Their shouting signifies objection, not abjection.

All these acoustic attributes of the prints carry an effective satirical charge. But in order to understand Cruikshank’s composition of a soundtrack for the spectacle, we need to remember that Peterloo, like many mass rallies to the present day, was a festive event with a strong musical component. Marching bands played tunes and songs that were designed to maintain morale and foster community spirit and solidarity. Many of these songs, like the inscriptions on banners and flags, were defiant statements in their own right. When Henry Hunt arrived on the scene, he was greeted not only by a “universal shout” but by a band striking up “See the Conquering Hero Comes,” a popular patriotic song originally composed by Handel.<sup>41</sup> Appropriating, travestying, and pastiching seemingly incongruous or ideologically objectionable songs constituted a standard ploy of radical musical culture and played an important role in claiming patriotism for the radical cause. As the yeomanry began their offensive, bands even played “Rule Britannia” and the national anthem to try to avert disaster, but this musical declaration of peaceful intent fell on deaf ears.

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<sup>38</sup> Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (London: Simkin, Marshall, 1844), 1:205.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>41</sup> *Memoirs of Henry Hunt* (London: Thomas Dolby, 1820), 3:615; and Donald Read, *Peterloo: The “Massacre” and Its Background* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), 131. In September 1819 the radical periodical *Medusa* published a Peterloo song set to the tune of “See the Conquering Hero Comes.”

The ironic political valencies of Peterloo's music were not lost on Cruikshank. In his re-creation of the massacre, he included in each print a significant reference to popular songs. To take the "loudest" sound first, critics and historians have failed to notice that the title *Britons Strike Home!* refers to one of Britain's most popular political songs. In her survey of the tune's cultural progress, Martha Vandrei goes so far as to call the song an unacknowledged "third national anthem."<sup>42</sup> Originally composed for Henry Purcell's score of John Fletcher's *Bonduca, or The British Heroine* in 1695, the song is actually a rallying cry for the ancient Britons to take up arms against the Roman occupiers:

Britons, strike home!  
 Revenge, revenge your Country's wrong.  
 Fight! Fight and record. Fight!  
 Fight and record yourselves in Druid's Song.  
 Fight! Fight and record. Fight!  
 Fight and record yourselves in Druid's Song.

The historical displacement was easily ignored and, during the eighteenth century, the song acquired popular patriotic credentials, with the French conveniently replacing the marauding Romans. One of the reasons for the song's success was that its idea of British patriotism was ideologically broad, appealing to a wide cross section of political positions from loyalism to Whig liberalism. When the song was adapted for the purposes of anti-invasion propaganda in 1803, it retained this latitude. Its new lyrics evoked the pantheon of British republican heroes, which was a mainstay of liberal-radical toasts:

Repel the foe that, desperate, dares invade  
 The land protected by great Sydney's shade;  
 And in the cause for which your Hampden bled,  
 Should ev'ry Britons blood be freely shed;  
 A cause no less than Liberty and Life,  
 The poor man's Home, his Children and his Wife.

Anti-invasion caricature prints such as Charles Williams's *After the Invasion, the Levee en Masse, or Britons Strike Home* (1803) occlude this wider ideological appeal (fig. 15), though they helped to consolidate the song's popularity. In the immediate wake of Peterloo, Cruikshank saw an opportunity to reassign the song's roles of dastardly enemy and noble defender. Just as Waterloo became Peterloo, so the new "foe" is a previous protector of liberties against whom the people must "fight and record."

Cruikshank's ironic use of this song was fully in tune with radical culture. The debunking of loyalist notions of patriotism was one of the most prominent rhetorical tactics mobilized by the radical press. Francis Burdett's outraged "Address to the Gentlemen of England," which appeared on the front page of Thomas Wooler's *Black Dwarf* a few days after Peterloo, poured scorn on the so-called patriotism of the yeoman cavalry: "Yet, would to heaven, they had been Dutchmen, or Switzers, or Hessians, or Hanoverians, or ANYTHING RATHER THAN ENGLISHMEN, who have done SUCH deeds." He adds that his peers, the "GENTLEMEN OF ENGLAND,"

<sup>42</sup> Martha Vandrei, "'Britons Strike Home': Politics, Patriotism and Popular Song in British Culture, c. 1695–1900," *Historical Research* 87, no. 278 (2014): 679–702.





FIGURE 15 Charles Williams, *After the Invasion, the Levee en Masse, or Britons Strike Home* (1803)

must “JOIN THE GENERAL VOICE, loudly demanding justice and redress.”<sup>43</sup> The typography represents justified, rather than outlandish, shouting; Burdett evokes the histrionic atmosphere of platform oratory, which in the view of the authorities constituted Peterloo’s primary offense (Hunt was arrested before he could begin to speak).<sup>44</sup> But such declamations, which express incredulity and outrage in equal measure, and which reverberate all the way to the somnambulant Shelley, still lack the brilliant wit and brio of Cruikshank’s caricatures that reenact the catastrophe as a tragic farce, complete with ironic musical accompaniment.<sup>45</sup> Cruikshank deflates state power by subjecting it to the generic domination of popular political culture, that radical “underworld” of “free and easie” conviviality, satire, mockery, and travesty that the government was unable to eradicate.<sup>46</sup> It is telling that the most successful of all his Peterloo productions, the *Political House that Jack Built*, reimagines politics as a popular children’s nursery rhyme.

The other “soundtrack” to be considered emanates from the speech bubble of the Prince of Wales in *Manchester Heroes*. Cruikshank replaces the Regent’s notorious praise for the “prompt

<sup>43</sup> *Black Dwarf*, August 25, 1819.

<sup>44</sup> Fairclough (*Romantic Crowd*, 149–66) argues that radical periodicals believed they were presenting an unmediated report of political events.

<sup>45</sup> E. P. Thompson notes that, so far as the authorities were concerned, the “bitter jeering” of lampoons was “more hard to bear” than “full-blown libertarian rhetoric.” E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1977), 755.

<sup>46</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1790–1845* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

and decisive” measures of the authorities with a mock rallying cry. Egging on the troops, the prince promises that “your exploits shall live forever, in a Song or second Chevy Chase.” This is another knowing allusion. “Chevy Chase” was one of the best-known traditional British ballads. Joseph Addison declared it to be “the favorite ballad of the common people of England” in *Spectator* 70 (1711),<sup>47</sup> and it was the opening text in Bishop Percy’s influential *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The ballad tells the story of a futile border dispute between Earl Percy of England and Earl Douglas of Scotland in which both leaders are killed. According to Ruth Perry, the ballad celebrates martial prowess but also the “tragic absurdity of war. Reading or hearing the ballad, one is struck by the enormous waste of life on both sides and the triviality of the cause.”<sup>48</sup> This aspect of the poem, which one can assume lay beyond the comprehension of the Prince of Wales and his dullard yeomanry (at least, in their roles in this print), casts the one-sided “heroism” of the Manchester cavalry in an ironic light. Other ramifications of the ballad’s cultural history provide further unsettling incongruities and juxtapositions. In addition to being a ballad, “Chevy Chase” was a popular song whose melody was frequently adapted for political ends. In the 1760s its tune was used to celebrate the achievements of “Wilkes and Liberty” (fig. 16).<sup>49</sup> In the Romantic period, it appeared in a seditious *Spencean Songbook*, though it was also appropriated by the Evangelicals.<sup>50</sup> The last stanza of the ballad—praised by Addison for its message of national unity—could also be interpreted as a canny comment on the “foul debates” of 1819:

God save our king, and bless this land  
With plenty, joy and peace;  
And grant henceforth, that foule debate  
’Twixt noblemen may cease.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, those who knew Percy’s *Reliques* could have detected a further textual irony, as Percy explains in his editorial commentary that the battle began when Earl Percy infringed on Douglas’s fiefdom and took “liberty unpermitted.”<sup>52</sup>

By adding this ironic soundtrack to the visual spectacle of Peterloo, Cruikshank subjected the sadistic ruling classes of the prints to the “oppositional conviviality” of radical popular culture.<sup>53</sup> By 1819 the irreverent, travestying, and satirical use of toasts and songs delivered and sung at radical dinners, meetings, and rallies had evolved into a well-wrought ideological tool.<sup>54</sup> The national anthem was an obvious target: there were numerous radical versions with new lyrics,

<sup>47</sup> May 21, 1711; see Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator* (London: Joseph Tonson, 1712), 1:398.

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Perry, “War and the Media in Border Minstrelsy: The Ballad of Chevy Chase,” in *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain, 1500–1800*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (Aldershot: Ashgate 2010), 260.

<sup>49</sup> Groom notes that eighteenth-century ballads were frequently used for “sharply focused political satire.” Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy’s “Reliques”* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>50</sup> Hannah More was advised by Bishop Porteous to use the tune in her *Cheap Repository Tracts*. See Kate Horgan, introduction to *The Politics of Songs in Eighteenth-Century Britain, 1723–1795* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 4; and Robert Roscoe, *Chevy Chase: A Poem* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813).

<sup>51</sup> The last line was changed to “And foreign wars may cease” in *Waterloo: In Imitation of Chevy Chase, with Other Pieces* (n.p.: Forest Press, 1820). Sir Philip Sydney stated that he “never heard the old song” without “my heart moved more than with a trumpet” (Addison and Steele, *Spectator*, 1:398).

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Percy, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent, 1765), 1:229.

<sup>53</sup> See James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chap. 5.

<sup>54</sup> One of the more sophisticated venues of “radical expression” was the Crown and Anchor tavern on the Strand, London. Without referring specifically to Pandemonium, Parolin describes the venue as a “parliamentary-like

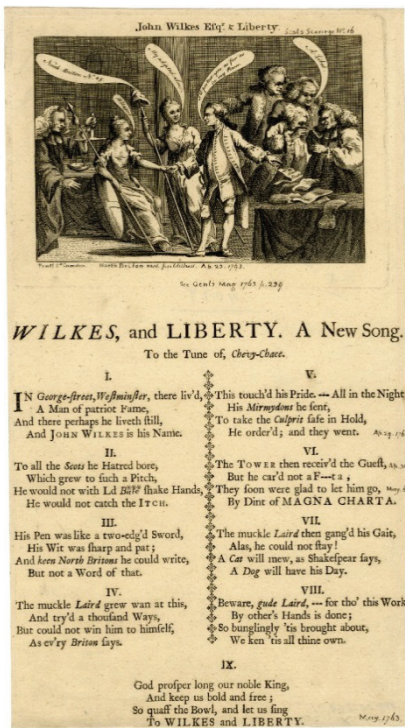


FIGURE 16 “Wilkes and Liberty” broadside

and refusing to sing the anthem at public gatherings and entertainment venues was a conspicuous form of protest (as, remarkably after all these years, it still is in monarchical England). Indeed, in early 1819 Henry Hunt was thrown out of Manchester’s Theatre Royal for refusing to stand and uncover his head for the playing of the national anthem.<sup>55</sup> The radical songbook of the Romantic period is finally beginning to receive some serious critical attention.<sup>56</sup> This is long overdue, as it is a recognized historical fact that the song was a highly prized genre in the ideological warfare of the 1790s and beyond. Thomas Paine, for example, declared that “it is time to dismiss all those songs and toasts which are calculated to enslave, and operate to suffocate reflection.”<sup>57</sup> The prevalence of disloyal songs was noted in the Secrecy Report of 1794:

Seditious toasts, and a studied selection of the tunes which have been most in use in France since the revolution, have been applied to the same purpose, of endeavoring to render deliberate incitements to every species of treason familiar to the minds of the people.<sup>58</sup>

culture.” Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London, 1790–1845* (Sydney: ANU Press, 2010), 151.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 154–55.

<sup>56</sup> See the multivolume Pickering and Chatto series *Poetry and Song in the Age of Revolution* (2012–14).

<sup>57</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, 158.

<sup>58</sup> *Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy* (London: J. Debrett, 1794), 26. Thomas Holcroft observed that “ballad singers were drilled, paid, and stationed at the end of streets, to chaunt the downfall of the Jacobins.” See Thomas Holcroft, *A Narrative of Facts, Relating to a Prosecution for High Treason* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1795), 12.



The popularity of songs and melodies in radical circles is easy to understand: they had little or no tangible form and so the singing of songs was difficult to prosecute; they were relatively easy to learn and remember; and unlike tracts and treatises, they required little intellectual effort and little or no financial expenditure. Though more research needs to be done on the circulation and performance of radical songs and tunes, it is likely that each radical faction had its own repertoire, though there was undoubtedly a shared canon of favorites such as “Britons Strike Home.” Thomas Evans summed up these advantages in the preface to his *Humorous Catalogue of Spence’s Songs* (1811):

Even under the modern Tyrannies of China, France, Turkey etc, what could hinder small companies from meeting, in a free and easy convivial manner, and singing their rights and instructing each other in songs? Can tyrants hinder people from singing at their work, or in their families? If not despair no longer but begin immediately, too much time has already been lost. Sing and meet and meet and sing, and your chains will drop off like burnt thread.<sup>59</sup>

A spy report on a well-attended Spencean meeting in East London in September 1817 shows that the government still had reason to fear radical toasts and sentiments, though an element of inebriated braggadocio probably played its part in the sensational denunciations:

Then Porter called silence and gave the first song—It was a song against the Prince Regent, about the fat pig in Hyde Park, and the King gone to St Paul’s—then others sang a great many songs all against government and after each man had done singing he gave a toast.... One was given by Porter and was this, “may the skin of the tyrants be burnt into parchment and the Rights of Man be written upon it.”<sup>60</sup>

In David Worrall’s tart words, this is “harlequin with an apocalyptic dagger.”<sup>61</sup> If we want to appreciate more fully the lived experience and cultural imaginary of early nineteenth-century radicalism, we need to listen more closely to the people “singing their rights.” This soundscape will also help us to understand why Shelley called his unpublished collection of “exoteric” poems “Songs, Wholly Political.”

## REFORMING PANDEMONIUM

When the dust had settled on the Peterloo killing field, when even the groans of the wounded and dying had receded, all that remained, according to Bamford, was the “ravished silence.” This takes us full circle to the pregnant, eerie stillness that preceded Shelley’s poetic awakening, as if the ghostly emanation of the “assembled multitude” had fled for succor to the exiled domicile of the Romantic poets, reversing the traditional westward migration of the spirit of Liberty. But Bamford’s phrase also recalls Keats’s “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” a poem composed just a few months before Peterloo. Keats’s “unravished bride of quietness,” with its frozen lovers, abandoned village, and ambiguous articulacy (is it the poet or the urn that speaks the famous philosophical nostrum at the end of the poem?), provides an intriguing intertext for the Manchester massacre. In the absence of the “assembled multitude,” could “visions of Poesy” redeem society?

<sup>59</sup> Cited in David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790–1820* (Hemel Hemstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 91.

<sup>60</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 91. See also McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 47, 99.

As in the 1790s, writers faced the dilemma of speaking loudly and defiantly—courting popular appeal, emulating platform oratory, and risking prosecution and censorship—or having a more private conversation with the reader and affecting public opinion through a Godwinian collision of minds. Conceiving of literature in terms of a soundscape can be an enlightening way to analyze a cultural moment synchronically. An initial aural assessment of poetry in the period of the Peterloo crisis might conclude that there were two dominant acoustic registers. On the one hand, there was the noisy sublime, both serious and satirical (*Mask of Anarchy*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *Hyperion*, *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, *Don Juan*). On the other hand, there were what Thelwall called the “noiseless pursuits of literature”: a quieter, lyrical quest for peace, “Daedal harmony,” and “perpetual Orphic song” (to borrow phrases from Shelley), the Amphionic rebuilding of the world by its unacknowledged legislators, the metrical engineers (Keats’s odes are a prime example of this mode). Admittedly, this is a schematic analysis, but it suggests the benefits of acoustic criticism for a moment of political crisis when getting oneself heard was a highly fraught issue.

The situation for caricature was very different. Unfettered by serious threats of prosecution (the Prince Regent, later George IV, preferred to hoard and bribe rather than litigate), satirical prints remained a noisy bastion of political critique. While Shelley failed to make his “exoteric” voice heard, a reinvigorated caricature enjoyed a boom phase in the reaction to Peterloo and the campaign on behalf of Queen Caroline. The mid-1820s were quieter years, but with the onset of the Reform Bill crisis in 1830, the political temperature rose to boiling point and Pandemonium broke out again. It seems appropriate to end this article with a boom, rather than a whimper, and to reimagine Romanticism’s dying moments as a final eruption of Shelley’s eloquent volcano. Though there were no great works of literature produced during these years, radical print culture and graphic satire were hyperactive. The radical press began its famous “war of the unstamped,” while single-print caricature enjoyed its last honeymoon period. The fear of revolution was never far away: opponents of the Reform Bill argued that reform would unleash a French-style insurrection; supporters of the bill argued that the same outcome would come from blocking reform. Radicals worried with some justification that they would be sold out once their campaigning muscle had helped to secure victory. One print in particular expressed in stunning visual terms the establishment’s phobias about the power of radical discourse. When Henry Hunt was elected to the still-unreformed Parliament in late 1830, caricaturists worked energetically to undermine his credibility. After Hunt asked Parliament to grant a general amnesty for the Swing rioters (the vote was resoundingly against him, with only Joseph Hume supporting the motion), William Heath responded with the eye-catching print entitled *Matchless Eloquence Thrown Away* (fig. 17).<sup>62</sup> Hunt is depicted in Parliament launching a salvo of blacking fluid from an enormous bottle that resembles an artillery piece. The visual pun alludes to his business career as the vendor of “matchless blacking,” or shoe polish, a trade that provided a propaganda gift to his opponents, who used it to mock his ungentelemanly social credentials and to exaggerate his vulgar political appeal to the public.<sup>63</sup> But a closer analogy for the spout of black fluid is that it resembles ink; seen in this

<sup>62</sup> Charles Jameson Grant published a near-identical copy, but I assume that Heath, the more respectable of the two artists, published the original. I discuss this print more fully in *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 7, though not from the perspective of sound.

<sup>63</sup> John Belchem, “Orator” Hunt: *Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 167–72; and John Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 146–54.



**FIGURE 17** William Heath, *Matchless Eloquence Thrown Away* (1831)

way, the print expresses an anxiety about the explosive force and pervasiveness of radical discourse.<sup>64</sup> Faced with a legion of yes-men saying “no,” Hunt unleashes the frustrated energies of the “shouting multitude” on his robotic, monovocal antagonists. Like Thelwall, he “speaks the voice of thousands,” both as an elected politician and as the mover of the clemency petition whose words are faintly visible within the volcanic flow. Though Hunt stands alone, his blast of righteous ire recalls the anthem of *Mask of Anarchy*: “ye are many, they are few.” [A]

<sup>64</sup> Hunt did in fact supply “easy-flowing, never-fading, writing ink” to the radical press. See Belchem, “*Orator*” Hunt, 169.